



POVERTY: THE MAIN SOURCE OF THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND DISEASES

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ABSTRACT

Every society has its own ideals which lead the society to progress and more progress. Disorganization of society means the violation of this social ideal, consciously by the members of the society. Social pathology is a study of social disorganization or maladjustment. There is an intimate relation between individual and society. This relation becomes otherwise, if society becomes infested with evils. When a person loses sight of the common good or the good of the society, he becomes the source of social problem. He becomes selfish. Self-interest or self-aggrandisement at the cost of others becomes the be all and end all in his life. But in reality, the interest of the society and the interest of the individual are not antagonistic but correlative. Social development and progress consists in the progress of the individual in moral and social life. Poverty is one of the delinquent behaviour. Poverty in the home plays a significant role in producing a delinquent. But poverty is not a sole factor; it is a contributory factor no doubt. It is to be noted that if the majority of the delinquents are needy, the majority of the needy do not become delinquents. Poverty can only engender crime by its ultimate action, through ways more often circuitous than plain, upon the inner mental life of the potential offender.

KEYWORDS: Circuitous, Delinquent, Disorganization, Maladjustment, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Social evils arise out of the individual's maladjustment to the social ideas that are common goods and gratification of his own interests. Harmony of the individual good and the goods of the society are the basis of the stability and health of the society. The society is like a human body. Any discord in the arrangement of the social elements with which the society is composed may disorganise the society. This disorganisation of the society gives rise to various social maladies which are mostly anti-social acts. Various anti-social acts are committed in the society when it becomes disorganised. Every society has its own ideals which lead the society to progress and more progress. Disorganization of society means the violation of this social ideal, consciously by the members of the society. Social pathology is a study of social disorganization or maladjustment. There is an intimate relation between individual and society. This relation becomes otherwise, if society becomes infested with evils. When a person loses sight of the common good or the good of the society, he becomes the source of social problem. He becomes selfish. Self-interest or self-aggrandisement at the cost of others becomes the be all and end all in his life. But in reality, the interest of the society and the interest of the individual are not antagonistic but correlative. Social development and progress consists in the progress of the individual in moral and social life.

In almost all countries where per capital income is low, income inequality has resulted in a number of evils of which poverty is certainly the most serious one. It is generally agreed that only they who fail to reach a certain minimum consumption should be regarded as poor. Poverty is regarded as the main source of the social problems and diseases. Poverty is one of the delinquent behaviour. Poverty in the home plays a significant role in producing a delinquent. But poverty is not a sole factor; it is a contributory factor no doubt. It is to be noted that if the majority of the delinquents are needy, the majority of the needy do not become delinquents. Poverty can only engender crime by its ultimate action, through ways more often circuitous than plain,

upon the inner mental life of the potential offender. The poverty we are familiar with in industrialised nations is relative poverty-meanings that some citizens are poor, relative to the wealth enjoyed by their neighbours. Here I want to say regarding absolute poverty. Absolute poverty is, as McNamara has said, "responsible for the loss of countless lives, especially among infants and young infants and young children. When absolute poverty does not cause death, it still causes misery of a kind not often seen in the affluent nations."¹ Malnutrition in young children stunts both physical and mental development. According to the United Nations Development Programme, 180 million children under the age of five suffer from serious malnutrition. Millions of people on poor diets suffer from deficiency diseases, like goitre, or blindness caused by a lack of vitamin A. The food value of what the poor eat is further reduced by parasites such as hookworm and ringworm, which are endemic in conditions of poor sanitation and health education. Death and disease apart, absolute poverty remains a miserable condition of life, with inadequate food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health services and education. The Worldwatch Institute estimates that as many as 1.2 billion people live in absolute poverty. For the purposes of this estimate, absolute poverty is defined as "the lack of sufficient income in cash or kind to meet the most basic biological needs for food, clothing and shelter."² Absolute poverty is probably the principal causes of human misery today.

The categorisation of poverty as a violation of human rights and talk of the abolition (rather than the eradication) of poverty may be seen at the very least as attempts give a higher priority to the elimination of poverty as an economic and political.³ As such it will be applauded and encouraged by everyone who recognises the horrendous realities of widespread extreme poverty of the sort experienced by over a quarter of the world's population. Approaching poverty through the prism of human rights is to lift it from the status of a social problem to that of an unavoidable imperative. To talk of poverty in terms of human rights

violations is to endorse the parity and inter-connection of basic social and economic rights with fundamental civil and political rights. Currently, while official cognisance is given to the equal importance of economic and social rights on the one hand and civil and political rights on the other,⁴ there is no doubt that, for one reason or another, social and economic rights are in practice relatively neglected. Torture is held to be unacceptable, poverty merely unfortunate. The idea of poverty as a human rights violation is clearly intended to send a powerful moral message that this bifurcation of human rights is a thing of the past. The categorisation of poverty as a violation of human rights may also be seen as a move towards bringing new mechanisms to bear on the elimination of poverty.⁵ In addition to more stringent and forcefully expressed UN monitoring of state performance with respect to social and economic rights,⁶ we may contemplate extending such surveillance to the activities of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations,⁷ and bringing the focus of human rights NGOs more on to issues of poverty.⁸ A further implication may be that we should further develop legal remedies that empower the poor to obtain their rights. Poverty cannot be abolished in the sense of eliminated simply by passing laws making its persistence illegal even if people try their best to conform to such laws. If the analogy is with the abolition of slavery, for instance, it is not easy to see what is the equivalent in relation to poverty of withdrawing the legal endorsement of treating people as property. However, possibilities range from withdrawing the legal recognition of debts incurred by poor people to the enactment of a positive duty on specified individuals or organisations to provide material support for those who lack the necessities of life. Additionally, in both domestic and international law, such as civil liability for behaviour negligently fostering poverty, or criminal penalties for knowingly implementing policies and practices, both in government and business, that avoidably increase, or fail to decrease, poverty. Giving individuals or groups the right to sue for reparations on the grounds of poverty is certainly one of the principal outcomes that are anticipated from adopting the new paradigm. Other less radical but actually more ambitious implications may be providing a justification for some form of global taxation earmarked for human development, with respect to eliminating poverty, such as the Tobin tax on international financial transactions,⁹ or Thomas Pogge's Global Resources Dividend, or, more appropriately in my view, a Global Humanitarian Levy paid by those who are sufficiently affluent to make a small contribution to poverty relief without any hardship to themselves. Or it may be that by seeing poverty as a violation of human rights we are in effect encouraging the constitutionalisation of social and economic rights, so that courts, not governments will be given the task of setting minimum standards in these areas, voiding legislation that they consider increases or fails to decrease the incidence and degree of poverty in that jurisdiction, or requiring specified resources to be provided by governments or employers or intervening when governments fail to contribute adequately to international poverty relief. Finally, an implication of seeing poverty as a violation of human rights might be that economic sanctions, loss of access to loans, or even armed intervention may be envisaged at least to the extent that these methods are utilised with respect to the protection of civil and political rights. Once we have in view what might be the implications of the proposal we can turn to the issue of its justification. Here we come up against the initial difficulty that the implied scenarios may be more problematic in the case of social and economic rights, than with civil and political ones, not because widespread and severe poverty is less significant morally than deprivation of the right to vote or systematic torture, but because the causes and cures of poverty are much more elusive, much more controversial, much

more challenging than many other human rights deficits. Experts disagree about the factors that produce or sustain poverty and about the economic policies and that offer most hope of poverty elimination. It is generally accepted that eradicating poverty requires more than redistribution of income. If the more that is required is enabling poor people to be able to provide for their own material necessities then there may be considerable controversy over how to bring this about. Further, mechanisms do not exist for the systematic redistribution of resources throughout the world. This affects not only the problem of identifying precise human rights obligations with respect to the reduction and eradication of poverty, but also the prospect of establishing legal claims against those who are alleged to be responsible for the poverty in question. Then, with respect to the constitutionalisation of social and economic rights, courts may lack the expertise to know which laws they should void in the interests of poverty reduction and what it is proper for them to require governments to provide by way of welfare policies and economic strategy. And the more they intervene in this sphere the more there will be democratic issues raised as to their legitimacy to determine economic and social policy. In these circumstances it may be unjust, ineffectual and sometimes counter-productive to contemplate legal remedies and international sanctions in order to deal with alleged violations of human poverty rights or to legally 'abolish poverty'. These familiar objections to treating social and economic rights on a par with civil and political rights are far from conclusive, but they do require clear and considered responses. The rhetoric of 'violation' and 'abolition' may be given the clarity and precision that is required to enable us to scrutinise the proposal and there may be powerful considerations in favour of one or more of the alternative implications of seeing poverty as a human rights violation. Certainly there is no reason to exclude endorsement of some version of the tenet of the human rights movements that social and economic rights are in a mutually supportive relationship to civil and political rights. It is now well established that the logical and practical differences between justifiable and non-justifiable rights, between costless and costly rights, and between negative and positive rights has been greatly exaggerated, perhaps for ideological reasons. Social and economic rights cannot be left in the aspiration basket.

It is important to note here that the facts about global injustice feature in two rather distinct matters: the extent of poverty, and the degree of inequality involved. This is the familiar distinction between absolute and relative poverty. The latter concerns the facts of inequality, that one person or group has more or less than another. Relative poverty simply means being at the low end in the measure that is adopted to compare the holdings of those being studied. The former focuses on what it is to be poor, irrespective of any comparisons that may be drawn with others. Absolute poverty is defined as a deprivation of that which is required to live a life that is worse than that delineated by standards (stating basic needs, minimum capabilities etc) that apply irrespective of relative holdings. Conceptually, it allows that we may all be equally poor, or that, in some unequal societies, no one is actually poor. I am concerned in this essay with both relative and absolute poverty, but the two interests have different foci. It is principally the existence of absolute poverty on which I concentrate as the problem. Relative poverty is something I take up, not in determining what is wrong with absolute poverty, but in the context of determining who has the obligation to remedy this undesirable state of affairs. That is, the basic problem is poverty not inequality as such, but inequality features in the articulation of a solution to the problem. Putting the issue in terms of rights, the proposition to be analysed is that everyone has a right to the means of basic subsistence: the right

to the material and social conditions necessary to remain alive, in normal health and in reasonable comfort. As this is a universal right (it applies to everyone everywhere), as it is undeniably an important (perhaps the most important) right, and as it is something that we can individually and collectively do something about, it is a clear candidate for being categorised as a human right. On what grounds might we believe that such a right does or ought to exist? We have to be clear here whether we are dealing here with moral human rights or positive human rights. Moral human rights are claims that we believe ought to be recognised universally (either in morality or law). Positive human rights are rights that exist in actual systems of social norms (societal rights) or posited in human legal systems, such as the International Bill of Rights (that is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights). Positive legal human rights do include such a right to subsistence. Article 25.1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (which may be regarded as 'soft law') reads: 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, housing and medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control'. This is echoed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 11.1: 'The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living from himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.' The positive right to a decent standard of living is therefore clear and by now authoritatively expressed in international law.

Social progress depends in some extent, on economic progress. Poverty is one of the hindrances to the social progress. If needs of the citizens of a country are not met the social progress will be halted. Poverty may be defined as the inability to secure the minimum consumption requirements for life, health and efficiency. These requirements necessarily include minimum human needs in respect of food, clothing, housing education and health. Denial of minimum consumption needs causes human misery. By damaging the health and efficiency of the affiliated section of the labour force, It makes it all the more difficult to raise production and relieve poverty in the future. Removal of poverty should be the essential of the strategy of social development and progress.

Before conclude I would like to say that poverty is the main ailment in our country. It refers to a degree of deprivation of worldly goods without having glimpses of it. Near empty stomachs, semi-naked bodies, bare feet, bulging bellies, shrivelled limbs, sunken cheeks, listless eyes, blank faces and pervasive disease and debility are some of its common identification marks of poverty. It shows up in varying degrees all over the country. In short, poverty in India is a grim affair, a negation of human dignity. One thing we have to remember that poverty cannot be removed by any theoretical discussion. It is deeply rooted in the low level of economic development and extreme inequalities of income and assets. Alleviation and removal of poverty depend on the pace of economic development. Accelerated growth is an essential condition for removal of poverty. A high rate of growth is a necessary for progress towards removal of poverty. Social security schemes should be launched. Various social security schemes should cover the whole or even the majority of the population.

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